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AUTHOR Bagley, Michael T.
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ABSTRACT

Major problems with resource room programs for children with learning disabilities are discussed, and an alternative approach, the teacher-consultant model, is described. Sections provide information on the following program components: staff selection, staff training, consultant services, and program evaluation. Listed among the changes resulting from the consultant model are a decrease of labeling, more sharing of ideas and materials between teachers, and occasions where the teacher has requested videotaping of her performance for the purpose of evaluation. (SB)

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New Perspectives on Supportive Services for Children Having Learning Problems in the Regular Classroom: The Teacher Consultant Model - An Approach to Consider

Michael T. Bagley
Assistant Director
Instructional Services
Ardsley, New York

RATIONALE

During the past decade, educators have explored a variety of alternative instructional arrangements for children experiencing learning difficulties. Recent investigation has found that the most widely used instructional model for learning disabled students is the Resource Room Program (Kirk and Elkins, 1974). According to Hammill and Wiederholt (1972), a resource room is a specific area usually located in a school building, where a specially trained teacher assesses and remediates children referred by the classroom teacher as having serious learning and behavior problems. For the most part, students receive remedial instruction three to five times per week, usually in small groups, with varying degrees of carry-over to the regular classroom. This brief description, perhaps, represents the functional definition adopted by many institutions throughout the country.

On the basis of the writer's experience in developing and implementing resource room programs in three states, several problems have become apparent which may be related to inconsistencies in student performance reported by districts. The following represents some major problem areas:

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First: Regular teachers are being lead to believe that the purpose of the resource program is to assign as many learning deficient students as possible, for as much of the day as possible and then hoping to relinquish as much responsibility for those students as possible.

Second: The practice of segrating students into stigma attached areas, i.e., an area that is sometimes labeled as a "Special Education Center", or even worse has the windows covered with newspapers with just a large enough hole for passers-by to peak in with wonderment.

Third: Unfortunately, many of the appointed resource teachers have not been properly trained and avoid contact with regular teachers out of fear of being put into an embarrassing position, e.g., demonstrating a deficiency in basic reading principles. If allowed to persist, remediation will become more isolated and unrelated to program objectives and teacher expectations.

Fourth: For the most part, administrators of resource programs have given little emphasis toward the involvement of the resource teacher as an in-service trainer or consultant to the regular teachers, i.e., "someone who could provide regular educators with additonal skills and competencies required to undertake remedial activities independently, and to prevent certain problems from developing." (Newcomer, 1976)

Fifth: Emphasis on measurement and performance evaluation has been practically non-existent, leaving in many cases, only the teachers subjective opinion as to student progress. Being in an era of cost-effectiveness and accountability, improperly evaluated programs from a standpoint of student growth and teacher effectiveness may be terminated, leaving no support program at all.

Space does not permit for a more extensive discussion of the many problems common to Resource Room Programs and other similar support programs. As a result of the problems mentioned above, personal observations of existing resource programs, survey information and related literature, it is the writers belief that modification and revision of exsisting instructional support programs is necessary in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of instructional support to children experiencing learning difficulties. An alternative to the resource room model is the Teacher-Consultant Model, described by Newcomer (1976) as a specialist who provides the regular educator with the additional skills and competencies required to undertake such remedial activities independently, and to prevent certain problems from developing. The consultant is also thought of as someone who has the skills to conduct remediation, act as a materials resource and provide demonstrations of instructional strategies and techniques (McKenzie, 1971; Bagley and Larsen, 1976; Rabinowitz and Basso, 1976).

In the following sections, an attempt will be made to discuss

a) selection of teacher-consultants, b) training of teacher-consultants, c) consultant services, d) program evaluation, e) implications.

IMPLEMENTATION

Staff Selection

The process of selecting staff for participation in the Teacher-Consultant Program is extremely difficult considering the expectations for excellence, in-depthness of instructional knowledge and an array of inter-personal skills required for the position. A series of interviews were conducted following recommendations made by supervisory staff in which the candidates had to respond to simulated situations requiring educational decisions. This technique proved to be highly successful in that it enabled the selection committee to assess the teachers logical thinking, utilization of experiences, organization, and ability to make appropriate recommendations. In addition to the interview process, each candidates credentials were verified and contacts were made of school personnel, primarily teachers, with whom the candidates had worked with previously.

After careful consideration, a staff of eight teachers were selected that had at least five years of total classroom experience with a minimum of two years of regular classroom experience. It was felt that even though these individuals possessed a wide range of skills and training it was critical that they had experience interacting with 25 students on a regular basis and direct contact with other teachers.

A requisite for being appointed to the position was their willingness to participate in a two-part summer training program.

Staff Training

An area which has received very little planning, implementation, and evaluation by educators has been in the training of support staff. It as been the practice of school systems to conceptualize and develop elaborate remedial programs and then fail to adequately involve and prepare staff for effective implementation, i.e., conduct training sessions for the purpose of familiarizing staff with district priorities, program restrictions, support and specifics related to the process of instruction.

For these reasons and others, considerable effort was given to the development of a comprehensive training program for teacher-consultants. Due to the nature of the model (teacher-consultant) steps had to be taken to incorporate a concentration of interpersonal relationship skills. Varying resources were contacted to assist in developing such a training component. Among them were university demonstrations and field training consultants (University of Michigan), IBM Management Training Service. The latter proved to be most beneficial in that the terminology and strategies used in training managers were surprisingly appropriate, effective and stimulating for the consultants being trained.

The first part of the training program, Module I, scheduled for one week in June, was entitled Personal Effectiveness. It included the following training components:

Self-Evaluation

Role-Playing

Sensitivity Training

Observation Skills

Date Collection

Management of Time

Performance Planning

The consultants were relieved of their regular teaching assignments so that full day planning could be developed focusing on the above named components. This phase of the training was coordinated by a university consultant experienced in sensitivity training and group dynamics. Specific activities were arranged which required the active participation of the consultants, e.g., role playing, simulation, self-evaluative exercises, etc. The emphasis was put on the process of examining the personal reactions, feelings, and perceptions of each of the participants. Sensitive issues related and unrelated to education were dealt with as a means of exploring the individual personalities of the group.

A number of activities were designed to enhance the communication and awareness skills of the consultants. An area of concentration was in developing good listening abilities of specialists, i.e., their inability to allow teachers' adequate, uninterrupted time to discuss classroom problems or personal difficulties. It has been the practice of the specialist to elicit teacher comments and as the teacher begins to explain her concerns, the specialist interrupts and begins a dissertation encompassing many "fuzzies," words with a multitude of meanings, never letting the teacher complete her original explanation, i.e., ineffective listening. Another activity the consultants participated in was role playing. A situation was created having the consultants identify with a

certain role, e.g., classroom teacher, school administrator, reading specialist, parent, etc., and then being asked to resolve a difficult problem related to school failure. This process enabled the consultants to explore, experience, and synthesize information relative to other disciplines involved in problem solving.

Other Module I activities included, the process of evaluating one's performance in terms of completed objectives, positive changes in behavior, plus the evaluation of other specifics developed in the planning stage. Demonstrations were held and recommendations were made relating to systematic behavior observation and data collection. Certain techniques designed to enhance the consultants' ability to assess the classroom behavior of deviant learners were discussed.

These activities represent part of the components which were dealt with in the Module I training program.

The second part of the consultant training program, Module II, scheduled for three days in August, was entitled Instructional and Supportive Effectiveness. It included the following training components:

Task/Error Analysis

Informal Assessment

Systematic Instruction and Evaluation

Instructional Settings

Teacher-Made-Materials

Materials-Resource

Precision Teaching

The consultants volunteered their time to participate in part two of the training program. This phase of the training was coordinated by the writer who has had considerable experience in in-service training, graduate teaching in learning disabilities, and classroom experience. Due to space limitation, only some highlights will be presented. These include:

1. Emphasis and discussions focused on the theory, nature and composition of informal assessment, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the procedure. Several informal assessment techniques were presented.
2. Popham and Baker's four part Instructional Model was examined, emphasizing the procedure whereby the teacher, as a technically skilled expert can, over time, systematically improve the quality of his instruction. (Specify Objectives, Pre-Assess, Select Learning Activities, Evaluate.)
3. Several alternative instuctional arrangements were explored. These included: small group in class, small group out of class, individualized instruction in class/out of class, peer tutoring, plus others.
4. A specialist in developing teacher-made-materials demonstrated an array of motivating, practical materials which could be easily constructed by the classroom teacher. Discussion continues in the material area by having two representatives from the Special Education Instructional Materials Center demonstrate the ways and means of evaluating and obtaining useful material.

5. Some specific techniques used in classroom management were demonstrated to the group (precision teaching, point system, buddy system, etc.)

The topics listed above give some idea as to the components and areas of concentration dealt with in the Module II training program.

Both Module I and II training programs were evaluated by the consultants and received very high ratings on an evaluation form.

This part of the consultant training program was concluded at the end of Module II. However, written into the Teacher Consultant Model are provisions for ongoing training sessions to be conducted by the writer in affiliation with the Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Southern Westchester (BOCES). The consultants would work in their schools for four and a half days with the half day being set aside for the BOCES inservice training. The nature of these weekly training sessions was determined by many variables which include, classroom teacher needs, consultant needs, community needs and priority needs, availability of consultants or workshop leaders, and budget. These sessions provided a valuable opportunity for exchanging consultant strategies, discussion of problems, and sharing of materials. Further discussion of this aspect of the program will be found in the program evaluation section of this paper.

Consultant Services

This section will be dealt with in terms of three areas: Instructional responsibility, materials resource, and consultant to classroom teachers.

Instructional Responsibility

It was anticipated that the consulting services would be more frequently requested and more readily accepted by the staff if the consultants focused upon a core-group of children first. Therefore, the priority target of the consultants was to demonstrate that with appropriate intervention and effective carry-over into the classroom program, significant improvement could be achieved with the core students in the first year. Upon completion of a referral procedure, each of the consultants was assigned a group of core-children who demonstrared serious academic deficiencies in the basic school subjects. The consultants were to assess the children's strengths and weaknesses, determine appropriate instructional strategies and groupings and then attempt to make these students more effective learners. Although the primary focus was on instructing the core students, the consultants developed opportunities for strengthening positive relationships and demonstrating credibility with the classroom teachers. As the year progressed, some children were returned to their classrooms; others were enrolled in the consultant program.

High emphasis was placed on establishing carry-over between resource room instruction and classroom curricula, and vice-versa. As mentioned earlier, one of the weak points of support instruction has been the lack of, or inconsistent carry-over between regular teacher and support teachers. Several core children received instruction from the consultant within the regular classroom, an approach that has several advantages. First, the student is not

removed from his natural instructional environment, second, average achieving peers can be utilized in small group activities, third, it can demonstrate the instructional competence of the consultant, fourth, it may enhance carry-over. It must be mentioned, however, that this procedure can have negative effects on some children as well as some teachers. Therefore, one must consider all the variables prior to implementing such an arrangement.

Materials Resource

Each of the consultants had a room which contained various instructional materials and equipment. Every attempt was made to make this material available to classroom teachers, including demonstrations, actual utilization of the materials in the regular classroom, and inservice workshops. The consultants spent a great deal of time becoming familiar with the wide range of supplemental material for each grade level with which they were involved. One resource that was constantly tapped with the Instructional Materials Center. Here the consultants could borrow an array of diversified learning materials and at the same time be advised as to new innovated material received by the center. Having been exposed to training sessions on the development of teacher-made-material, consultants were able to construct various materials which could be used by the regular classroom teacher. This particular skill proved to be a most valuable asset for the consultant, as expressed by classroom teachers. A constant dialogue was kept between teacher and consultant concerning the materials needed by the teacher, every effort was made to fulfill as many requests as possible. Unfortunately, during the first year, the

area of being a material resource for the classroom teachers was met with limited success (Basso and Rabinowitz, 1976).

Consultant to Classroom Teachers

In general, the consultant served as an "in-house" resource whose effectiveness was determined by the extent of materials made available, the validity and appropriateness of remedial suggestions offered to teachers, and specific academic progress made by students for whom prescriptions were written. One of the main focal points of this model is the process of working with and training teachers in order to provide them with additional instructional skills and competencies. It is the contention of this writer, that with improved understanding of atypical behavior, more flexibe expectations, and better employed classroom management techniques, positive effects will be noticed in terms of fewer referrals, fewer teacher-child characteristic difficulties, and general instructional effectiveness. In addition to daily interactions with classroom teachers, each of the consultants was responsible for conducting monthly workshops resulting from a needs assessment administered to the regular teachers at the beginning of the school year. The workshops primarily dealt with techniques for individualizing instruction, analyzing behavior and employing evaluative procedures. For the most part, teachers were receptive, since the topics being discussed were related to their individual needs and the workshops lasted only 45 minutes and did not infringe necessarily upon their personal time.

While functioning as consultants several concerns have to be kept in mind.

These include:

1. Don't over commit yourself by making promises that will be difficult to accomplish. Quality may be better than quantity.
2. Don't appear over anxious in attempting to gain entrance to a particular teacher's classroom. Remember the "closed-door policy" has existed for decades.
3. Let the teacher know you are not interested in evaluating her as a teacher: you are interested in helping children become more effective learners.
4. Never make evaluative comments about other staff members, remain neutral and concern yourself with the problems at hand.

Some preliminary investigation of teachers' attitudes and interaction patterns has been reported by (Basso and Rabinowitz, 1976; Rabinowitz, 1976).

Program Evaluation

Measurement and evaluation has become an integral component of many newly developed educational support programs. Demands by boards of education, administration and parents to demonstrate cost-effectiveness in programming have increased. In developing the Teacher-Consultant Model, several evaluative aspects were incorporated. These include:

1. All students participating in the program would be pre and post tested in the academic and behavioral area. The SRA achievemnt tests were used for the academic area, while self-concept and behavior rating scales were used in the behavior area. Refer to Bagley and Larsen, (1976) for testing procedures.
2. Data was collected on the number of regular teacher-consultant interactions (Rabinowitz, 1976).
3. Due to the consultative nature of the model, classroom teachers' attitudes regarding the acceptance or rejection of the program became very important data. Investigation of teachers' attitudes was conducted by Basso and Rabinowitz, 1976.
4. BOCES weekly inservice workshops were evaluated by the consultants using a workshop evaluation form. This information provided the coordinators an opportunity of modifying ineffective workshop methods.

These evaluation procedures represent an initial attempt at measuring certain aspects of the model, including student progress, which is probably the most important area.

It is anticipated that new methods of measurement will be incorporated and that these procedures will undergo continuous monitoring. The design and instruments being employed currently as evaluation tools, despite their unknown validity and reliability, have provided a substantial amount of pertinent information which has been utilized in further developing the model.

Implications

The maze of interacting behaviors occurring in classrooms is rich and complex and can be understood only if the observer can see and assess a wide variety of classroom factors (Good and Brophy, 1973). These factors are magnified when dealing with children having learning and behavior problems. Ameliorating these deficiencies is a major challenge for persons responsible for developing supportive services.

The Teacher-Consultant Model briefly discussed in this paper has been an attempt to provide supportive services not only for students but for teachers as well. It is the writer's contention that a well structured, carefully implemented, and appropriately assessed support program aimed at increasing the skills and competencies of classroom teachers will eventually result in improved instructional effectiveness with the entire class, not just a few deviant learners. This direct or indirect effect will enhance efforts toward personalizing the learning environment and reduce the number of learning and behavior problems related to situational factors.

The Consultant Model has had a rather positive effect on the academic progress of students, Bagley and Larsen (1976). It has equally effected the attitudes and actions of many of the regular teaching staff. The following are some observed changes.

1. Some teachers are much more open about their inability to be instructionally effective with a certain student, something that was previously not discussed.

2. Many teachers have expressed an open invitation policy for the consultant, which means the specialist is free to come into a classroom at any time, whether it be for instruction or observation.
3. More sharing of ideas and materials between teachers has been observed.
4. Less labeling of students has been noticed, i.e., teachers are more concerned with the performance level of a student on a given task, than considering an appropriate medical or processing label.
5. There have been several occasions where the classroom teacher has requested that the consultant arrange for a video-taping for the purpose of evaluating the teacher's performance.

In conclusion, the Teacher-Consultant Model described in this paper has achieved some success in improving the quality of instructional support to children experiencing learning problems.

If carefully planned steps are taken by other program administrators, this model can be implemented and can be potentially benefical to the entire community. However, there are many variables and restrictions districts have to contend with, which may effect this particular model and therefore may be totally inappropriate and unsuccessful. However, some of the concepts presented may have applicability for certain individuals and schools.

We can by no means feel comfortable or complacent with our achievements, thus a continued effort will be made to improve our understanding and competence as special educators.

TEACHER CONSULTANT MODEL

TRAINING COMPONENTS

MODULE I — PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- SELF-EVALUATION
- ROLE PLAYING
- SENSITIVITY TRAINING
- OBSERVATION SKILLS
- LISTENING SKILLS
- DATA COLLECTION
- MANAGEMENT OF TIME
- PERFORMANCE PLANNING

MODULE II — INSTRUCTIONAL AND SUPPORTIVE EFFECTIVENESS

- TASK/ERROR ANALYSIS
- INFORMAL ASSESSMENT
- SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION AND EVALUATION
- INSTRUCTIONAL SETTINGS
- TEACHER-MADE-MATERIALS
- MATERIALS - RESOURCE
- PRECISION TEACHING

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